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# Representative Christine Rolfes

## 2008 Session Update

Spring 2008

Dear Neighbor,

It was a busy 60 days in Olympia and I am glad to be back home with my family. During the short session we addressed a wide variety of issues, ranging from storm and disaster relief to protecting our kids from toxic toys. We also focused efforts on other issues important to Kitsap County, including:

- Ferry reform
- Healthcare
- Public education
- Housing and green communities

My thanks to those of you who returned the survey that I sent out prior to the start of session. It was great to receive people's suggestions on how to improve our schools, transportation, and health care systems. And it was fun to learn a little more about each of you! Clearly, taxes, ferries, public education, and our economy are on a lot of people's minds.

This newsletter is a quick update on some of the work we accomplished in 2008.

Many of you participated by contacting me over the course of the session, working on the issues locally, or traveling to Olympia to testify or meet with me and other legislators. Thank you.

And thank you for the honor of representing you in Olympia. I'm proud to be part of such a great community.

Sincerely,

Christine

## Overhauling the Ferry System

A strong state ferry system depends upon a commitment from the Legislature and effective participation in system planning by our ferry-served communities. The Ferry Summit that I co-hosted with Mayor Bozeman in Bremerton last December brought together leaders, ferry advocates, and transportation officials from throughout the Puget Sound region, to begin a collaborative effort to reform the system and address both effectiveness and accountability.

This effort translated into a remarkably productive 2008 legislative session for ferries.

**Our Five-Point Plan** for ferry reform works to control costs; overhaul management; provide reliable service and safety; build for the future; and provide accountability. SB 6932 is common-sense legislation that mandates the development of long-term vessel maintenance, preservation, construction, and provides a deployment plan for the entire system. An amendment I proposed assures that fuel and labor costs will be considered in long-term decision making.

**New Boats.** I fought hard to make sure \$368 million in funding for new vessels was included in this year's transportation budget. This funding should be enough to build safe boats to serve the Port Townsend run, as well as the larger vessels that we have long anticipated, including one for the Bremerton run.

**Fares.** Last year we froze ferry fares and I am happy to report the fares will remain frozen at 2007 levels at least through the fall of 2009. Cars traveling together will also now be able to share their fare cards thanks to direction provided by the legislature.

**Cutting Costs.** This year we reduced \$5 million in headquarters staffing, translating into \$75 million over the system's 16-year financial plan. We also saved \$106 million in overstated terminal preservation costs. Work to examine, prioritize, and reduce costs continues.

**Passenger Ferries.** I prime sponsored HB 2730, a bill that allows the Port of Kingston and other ports around Puget Sound to offer passenger-only service. I was also able to secure state "credits" to help leverage federal grants for boat acquisition. This will save our local providers millions as they work to bring back the Bremerton and Kingston runs.

While we still have some rough seas ahead of us, I look forward to working with the new director of the ferry system and the new Secretary of Transportation: we share the common goal of restoring the public's trust in system operations.

Outstanding participation in the Ferry Summit last winter set the stage for regional cooperation in Olympia this past session.





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2008 Session Update

Promoting Healthy, Sustainable Communities



Kitsap County residents are the state’s leaders in creating healthy, sustainable communities, from building green construction projects to supporting our vibrant farmers markets. I am excited to share some of our successes with my colleagues in Olympia. With advice from local builders, I prime-sponsored HB 3120, a bipartisan bill that looks at how the state can be a better partner in promoting energy-efficient, healthy, and low impact development.

I also sponsored the Local Farms, Healthy Kids Act, which makes it easier for our schools to buy fresh produce from local farmers. The measure helps local farmer’s markets accept food stamps and establishes a pilot project allowing food banks to purchase produce directly from farms.

And, important to Kitsap, we continued to work on the shared goal of improving salmon runs and protecting and restoring Puget Sound and Hood Canal.

Education: success for all students

Ensuring a world-class public education system for all of our kids remains a top priority. This year we continued to work toward that goal by:


**Revising Math Standards** to make sure our students are taught the skills and knowledge they need in today’s complex world.

**Improving the way we test** whether those standards are being met by our schools. This year, we created an end-of-course assessment in Algebra I & II and Integrated Math I & II.

**Enhancing Career & Technical Education** in high schools, helping students gain the skills they need for today’s jobs.

**Promoting Arts** - The Arts make a tremendous impact on the developmental growth of every child and play a strong role in our nation’s economy. I introduced a resolution that was approved by the House of Representatives to make sure that the Arts remain a vital part of Washington State’s core curriculum.

**Teacher salaries** - we know a good teacher is a vital part of a student’s school experience. Our supplemental budget took a significant step toward fulfilling the voter-approved teacher salary increases that had been promised but not provided.



Rep. Christine Rolfes and page Ambrielle Anderson of Central Kitsap on the House Floor. Students ages 14-18 interested in the page program should contact my Olympia office.



Higher Education opportunities in our area

One of the great positive impacts we can have on our local workforce and employers is adequate higher education and technical training. This year, area legislators secured a grant of \$212,000 for business, community, and education leaders to develop a program and an operating plan for a future University Center, to expand higher education opportunities for the Kitsap Peninsula.

We also continued to focus on strengthening Olympic College, retaining more than \$30 million in additional funding to update existing building facilities.

Supporting Military Families

During the session, the Legislature agreed to begin working with other states to help students in military families. Many of these kids find themselves frequently transferred to different areas of the country and to different schools. The interstate compact will help create a uniform system of record keeping and placement, attendance, residency and graduation requirements. It will help not just families who face unique challenges, but our local school districts as well. I look forward to ratifying the compact during our next session.


We also made going to school easier for the families of loved ones who make the greatest sacrifice. Legislation requires state institutions of higher learning to waive tuition and fees for the spouse and children of members of the military and National Guard who, in active service, are killed, suffer permanent disability, or are missing in action.

**Tax Relief**

Another bill provides property tax relief to retired veterans. The measure allows veterans who suffer service-related disabilities to deduct benefits received from the amount used to assess property tax reductions. For more information on this program, you can contact the Kitsap County Assessor at 360-337-7160 or visit the website at: <http://www.kitsapgov.com/assr/>

**Showing Your Pride**

We made changes to the armed forces vehicle license plates, including expansion of the type of plates issued for service in the National Guard, allowing members who serve in any branch of the National Guard to purchase plates in Washington. We also made it possible for more family members of living and deceased veterans, as well as the families of current service members, to purchase special armed forces plates. For more information, contact the Washington State Department of Licensing at (360) 902-3900 or visit the website at: <http://www.dol.wa.gov/vehicleregistration/specialplates.html>; you may also contact the Kitsap County Auditor, Auto Licensing at (360) 337-4440 or visit the website at: <http://www.kitsapgov.com/aud/licensing/licensing.htm>




Thinking long-term about health care

Affordable and accessible health care for everyone is something I take seriously. I heard from many of you last year when companies increased your insurance premiums – in some cases by up to 30 percent!

This year, we responded. We gave the Insurance Commissioner authority to review any proposed hikes in individual health insurance rates, and the power to veto unreasonable increases. We also passed HB 2560, which will make it easier for small employers to purchase insurance coverage through the small group market, where broader health plan options exist.

Locally, we were able to provide more than \$1 million dollars in support of the Kitsap Mental Health Keller House. The facility provides needed treatment and services to the mentally ill in our community.

It is important that we continue to hear from you as we move forward with a broader healthcare plan. We established a citizens’ work group which will travel all over the state this summer and discuss a range of healthcare options with you. Your involvement will help determine our agenda.



Affordable housing

This year the legislature responded to the mortgage lending crisis in a number of ways. Most significantly, we passed a bill that should not have been necessary: It provides increased protections to homeowners by stopping scam artists who offer false promises of rescue from foreclosure proceedings.

**Mobile Home Parks**

I am also proud to report that I played a key role in helping to secure passage of a bill specific to preserving a key part of our affordable housing inventory: manufactured home parks. Using lessons learned from the Islander Park in Winslow, we agreed to provide more incentives for park owners to work with tenants to preserve their homes, including an exemption from the Real Estate Excise Tax (REET) for park owners who sell their property to a community or tenant organization. The bill also provides more technical assistance for home owners to proactively participate in preserving their communities.

